



Press Release



**Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Michigan, 14th District**

**Ranking Member, U.S. House
Judiciary Committee
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**
www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/index.html

For Immediate Release:
July 13, 2005

Contact: Danielle Brown
202-225-1294

Conyers Says Patriot Act Reauthorization Fails To Balance Nation's Security With Civil Liberties

Representative John Conyers, Jr., (D-MI) House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member, released the following statement regarding the Judiciary Committee mark up of the Patriot Act Reauthorization:

"There is no more difficult task we have as legislators than balancing our nation's need for security against our citizens' civil liberties. Nearly four years after the tragedy of September 11, and in the midst of a war against terror without any clear endpoint, it is increasingly clear that we are failing in that task.

We failed when we rushed through the PATRIOT Act while the wreck of the World Trade Center was still smoldering. We failed when we refused to address the repeated civil liberties abuses by our own government. And we failed when we did not make the difficult political decisions necessary to protect our citizens against terrorism.

While the PATRIOT Act may not deserve all or even most of the ridicule that is leveled against it, there is little doubt that the legislation has been badly misused by the Department of Justice.

Just ask the more than 150 individuals who have had their homes secretly searched and ransacked under the PATRIOT Act, with nearly 90% of those cases having had nothing to do with the terrorism.

Just ask the more than 200 libraries, who have been asked to turn over their records to law enforcement officials.

Just ask Brandon Mayfield, an innocent Muslim American, whose phone was tapped, property was seized, computer was copied, children were spied on, and DNA taken, all without his knowledge.

Just ask Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss citizen and prominent Muslim Scholar, who was denied admission to teach at Notre Dame University due to his political beliefs.

Even worse than the PATRIOT Act has been the unilateral abuse of power by the Administration. Since September 11, our own government has detained and verbally and physically abused thousands of immigrants without time limit, for unknown and unspecified reasons, and selectively targeted tens of thousands of Arab-Americans for intensive interrogations and immigration screenings; all in the absence of a single terrorist conviction.

Our own Justice Department has condoned the torture of prisoners at home and abroad, authorized the monitoring of mosques and religious sites without any indication of criminal activity, and detained scores of individuals as "material witnesses" without good cause or reason.

Our own president has taken it upon himself to label U.S. citizens as enemy combatants without trial, lawyer, charges, or access to the outside world.

While some would argue it is not the duty of this Committee to respond to these abuses, I would assert that ignoring even a single cases of abuse by our own government constitutes an abdication of our responsibility as legislators. .

Finally, if we are serious about combating terror in the 21st century, we must move beyond symbolic gestures and color coded threat levels, and begin to make the hard choices needed to protect our nation.

If we really want to prevent terrorists from targeting our citizens and our cities, we need to stand up to the gun lobby and keep assault weapons out of the hands of suspected terrorists.

If we really want to prevent bombings like those which devastated London last week, we need to challenge the explosives industry to help us regulate sales of black and smokeless powder.

If we really want to protect our ports, trains, and other soft terrorist targets, we need to stop passing new tax cuts for the wealthy and start fully funding all of our homeland security needs.

To me the lessons of September 11 are that if we allow law enforcement to do their work free of political interference, if we give them adequate resources and modern technologies, we can protect our citizens without intruding on their liberties.

The bill before us today does not meet this test. It is my hope that we can come together at this markup – as we did four years ago – and craft a bill that fights terrorism the right way, consistent with our constitution and our values, and in a manner that serves as a model for the rest of the world.”

##JUD-109-07/13/05##